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of the action, the last half of her book is replete with beauty and vigor. What shall we call this quality? Imagination does not seem to us too grand a word. For, in the absence of knowledge, our authoress has derived her figures, as the German derived his camel, from the depths of her moral consciousness. If they are on this account the less real, they are also on this account the more unmistakably instinct with a certain beauty and grace. If Miss Alcott's experience of human nature has been small, as we should suppose, her admiration for it is nevertheless great. Putting aside Adam's treatment of Ottila, she sympathizes throughout her book with none but great things. She has the rare merit, accordingly, of being very seldom puerile. For inanimate nature, too, she has a genuine love, together with a very pretty way of describing it. With these qualities there is no reason why Miss Alcott should not write a very good novel, provided she will be satisfied to describe only that which she has seen. When such a novel comes, as we doubt not it eventually will, we shall be among the first to welcome it. With the exception of two or three celebrated names, we know not, indeed, to whom, in this country, unless to Miss Alcott, we are to look for a novel above the average.

18.—*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship and Travels. From the German of GOETHE.* By THOMAS CARLYLE. In Two Volumes. Boston: Ticknor and Fields. 1865. pp. 399, 388.

THIS new edition of Goethe's great novel will give many persons the opportunity of reading a work which, although introduced to the English public forty years ago, is yet known to us chiefly by hearsay. We esteem it a matter for gratitude that it should now invite some share of attention as a novelty, if on no other ground; and we gladly take advantage of the occasion thus afforded to express our sense of its worth. We hope this republication may help to discredit the very general impression that *Wilhelm Meister* belongs to the class of the great unreadables. The sooner this impression is effaced, the better for those who labor under it. Something will have been gained, at least, if on experiment it should pass from a mere prejudice into a responsible conviction; and a great deal more will have been gained, if it is completely reversed.

To read *Wilhelm Meister* for the first time is an enviable and almost a unique sensation. Few other books, to use an expression which Goethe's admirers will understand, so steadily and gradually *dawn* upon the intelligence. In few other works is so profound a meaning envel-

oped in so common a form. The slow, irresistible action of this latent significance is an almost awful phenomenon, and one which we may vainly seek in those imaginative works in which the form of the narrative bears a direct, and not, as it appears here to do, an inverse, relation to its final import; or in which the manner appeals from the outset to the reader's sympathy. Whatever may be the lesson which Goethe proposes to teach us, however profound or however sublime, his means invariably remain homely and prosaic. In no book is the intention of elegance, the principle of selection, less apparent. He introduces us to the shabbiest company, in order to enrich us with knowledge; he leads us to the fairest goals by the longest and roughest roads. It is to this fact, doubtless, that the work owes its reputation of tediousness; but it justifies the reputation only when, behind the offensive detail, the patient reader fails to discover, not a glittering, but a steadily shining generality. Frequently the reader is unable to find any justification for certain wearisome *minutiæ*; and, indeed, many of the incidents are so "flat," that the reader who comes to his task with a vague inherited sense of Goethe's greatness is constrained, for very pity, to supply them with a hidden meaning. It would not, therefore, be difficult to demonstrate that the great worth of *Wilhelm Meister* is a vast and hollow delusion, upheld by a host of interested dupes. The book is, indeed, so destitute of the quality of cleverness, that it would be comparatively easy for a clever man to make out any given case whatsoever against it; do anything with it, in short, except understand it. The man who is only clever may do much; but he may not do this. It is perhaps one of the most valuable properties of *Wilhelm Meister* that it does not react against this kind of manipulation. We gladly admit, nay, we assert, that, unless seriously read, the book must be inexpressibly dull. It was written, not to entertain, but to edify. It has no factitious qualities, as we may call them; none of those innumerable little arts and graces by which the modern novel continually and tacitly deprecates criticism. It stands on its own bottom, and freely takes for granted that the reader cannot but be interested. It exhibits, indeed, a sublime indifference to the reader,—the indifference of humanity in the aggregate to the individual observer. The author, calmly and steadily guided by his purpose, has none of that preoccupation of *success* which so detracts from the grandeur of most writers at the present day, and leads us at times to decide sweepingly that all our contemporaries are of the second class.

Of plot there is in this book properly none. We have Goethe's own assertion that the work contains no central point. It contains, however, a central figure, that of the hero. By him, through him, the

tale is unfolded. It consists of the various adventures of a burgher youth, who sets out on his journey through life in quest, to speak generally, of happiness,—that happiness which, as he is never weary of repeating, can be found only in the subject's perfect harmony with himself. This is certainly a noble idea. Whatever pernicious conclusions may be begotten upon it, let us freely admit that at the outset, in its virginity, it is beautiful. Meister conceives that he can best satisfy his nature by connecting himself with the theatre, the home, as he believes, potentially at least, of all noble aims and lessons. The history of this connection, which is given at great length, is to our mind the most interesting part of the whole work; and for these reasons: that those occasional discussions by which the action is so frequently retarded or advanced (as you choose to consider it), and of which, in spite of their frequency, we would not forfeit a single one, are here more directly suggestive than in subsequent chapters; and that the characters are more positive. The "Apprenticeship" is, in the first half, more of a story, or, to state it scientifically, more dramatic than in the last. If Goethe is great as a critic, he is at least equally great as a poet; and if *Wilhelm Meister* contains pages of disquisition which cannot be too deeply studied, it likewise contains men and women who cannot be forgotten. Meister's companions bear no comparison with the ingenious puppets produced by the great turning-lathe of our modern fancy.

There is the same difference between them and the figures of last month's successful novel, as there is between a portrait by Velasquez and a photograph by Brady. Which of these creations will live longest in your memory? Goethe's persons are not lifelike; that is the mark of our fashionable photographic heroes and heroines: they are life itself. It was a solid criticism of certain modern works of art, that we recently heard applied to a particular novelist: "He tells you everything except the very thing you want to know." We know concerning Philena, Aurelia, Theresa, Serlo, and Werner none of those things of which the clever story-teller of the present day would have made hot haste to inform us; we know neither their costume, nor their stature, nor the indispensable color of their eyes; and yet, for all that, they *live*,—and assuredly a figure cannot do more than that.

The women in *Wilhelm Meister* are, to our mind, truer even than the men. The three female names above mentioned stand for three persons, which abide in our memory with so unquestioned a right of presence that it is hard to believe that we have not actually known them. Is there in the whole range of fiction a more natural representation of a light-hearted coquette than that of the actress Philena,—she who, at the outset of an excursion into the country, proposes that a law be passed

prohibiting the discussion of inanimate objects? Where, too, is there as perfect an example of an irretrievable sentimentalist as her comrade Aurelia, she who, as herself declares, bears hard upon all things, as all things bear hard upon her, and who literally dies for the sake of poetic consistency? What an air of solid truth, again, invests the practical, sensible, reasonable Theresa!

Wilhelm's purpose being exclusively one of self-culture, he is an untiring observer. He listens to every man, woman, and child, for he knows that from each something may be learned. As a character, he is vague and shadowy, and the results of his experience are generally left to the reader's inference. Indeed, as his lessons are mostly gathered from conversations for which he furnishes the original motive, the reader may place himself in the hero's position of an eminently respectful auditor, and judge of the latter's impressions by his own.

Although incidentally dramatic, therefore, it will be seen that, as a whole, *Wilhelm Meister* is anything but a novel, as we have grown to understand the word. As a whole, it has, in fact, no very definite character; and, were we not vaguely convinced that its greatness as a work of art resides in this very absence of form, we should say that, as a work of art, it is lamentably defective. A modern novelist, taking the same subject in hand, would restrict himself to showing the sensations of his hero during the process of education; that is, his hero would be the broad end, and the aggregate of circumstances the narrow end, of the glass through which we were invited to look; and we should so have a comedy or a tragedy, as the case might be. But Goethe, taking a single individual as a pretext for looking into the world, becomes so absorbed in the spectacle before him, that, while still clinging to his hero as a pretext, he quite forgets him as a subject. It may be here objected, that the true artist never forgets either himself or anything else. However that may be, each reader becomes his own Wilhelm Meister, an apprentice, a traveller, on his own account; and as his understanding is large or small, will Wilhelm and the whole work be real or the contrary. It is, indeed, to the understanding exclusively, and never, except in the episode of Mignon, to the imagination, that the author appeals. For what, as we read on, strikes us as his dominant quality? His love of the real. "It will astonish many persons," says a French critic, "to learn that Goethe was a great scorner of what we call the ideal. Reality, religiously studied, was always his muse and his inspiration."

The bearing of *Wilhelm Meister* is eminently practical. It might almost be called a treatise on moral economy, — a work intended to show how the experience of life may least be wasted, and best be turned to

account. This fact gives it a seriousness which is almost sublime. To Goethe, nothing was vague, nothing empty, nothing trivial, — we had almost said, nothing false. Was there ever a book so dispassionate, or, as some persons prefer to call it, cold-blooded? In reading it, we learn the meaning of the traditional phrase about the author's calmness. This calmness seems nearly identical with the extraordinary activity of his mind, as they must both indeed have been the result of a deep sense of intellectual power. It is hard to say which is the truer, that his mind is without haste or without rest. In the pages before us there is not a ray of humor, and hardly a flash of wit; or if they exist, they are lost in the luminous atmosphere of justice which fills the book. These things imply some degree of passion; and Goethe's plan was *non flere, non indignari, sed intelligere*.

We do not know that in what we have said there is much to lead those who are strangers to this work to apply themselves to the perusal of it. We are well aware that our remarks are lamentably disproportionate to the importance of our subject. To attempt to throw a general light upon it in the limits here prescribed would be like striking a match to show off the *Transfiguration*. We would therefore explicitly recommend its perusal to all such persons, especially young persons, as feel that it behooves them to attach a meaning to life. Even if it settles nothing in their minds, it will be a most valuable experience to have read it. It is worth reading, if only to differ with it. If it is a priceless book to love, it is almost as important a one to hate; and whether there is more in it of truth or of error, it is at all events *great*. Is not this by itself sufficient? *Wilhelm Meister* may not have much else that other books have, but it has this, that it is the product of a great mind. There are scores of good books written every day; but this one is a specimen of the grand manner.

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19. — *Annals of the American Pulpit, or Commemorative Notices of Distinguished American Clergymen of various Denominations, from the early Settlement of the Country to the Close of the Year Eighteen Hundred and Fifty-five. With Historical Introductions.* By WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D.D. Volume VIII. *Unitarian Congregational.* New York: Robert Carter and Brothers. 1865. 8vo. pp. 578.

DOCTOR SPRAGUE'S chief design in the work of which the last published volume now lies before us was to introduce the several denominations of American Christians to one another's just appreciation and cordial esteem. He has effected this so naturally, genially, and felici-